

**Workforce Investment Act Title II
Adult Education and Family Literacy Act**

Assessment Policy Guidelines

December 2005
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California Department of Education

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Preface

This document provides policy guidelines pertaining to standardized assessment practices in California's adult literacy programs. It also fulfills the mandate from the U.S. Department of Education: Division of Adult Education and Literacy (ED:DAEL) that each state receiving Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title II funding develop, publish, and implement on an annual basis a written assessment policy (Memorandum from ED:DAEL Regarding State Assessment Policy Guidance, July 21, 2005). The memorandum requires states to describe the assessments local programs are to use, when local programs are to administer pretests and post-tests, training requirements for assessments, and assessment administration and reporting requirements.

The California Department of Education, (CDE) requires all eligible adult literacy program providers to use the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) standardized assessment instruments, and Tracking of Programs and Students (TOPSpro™) data collection and reporting software to report educational gain benchmarks by educational functioning levels.

The CASAS standardized assessment instruments are the only state approved instruments used for state and federal reporting requirements. The use of common assessment instruments based on the same standard score scale provides the National Reporting System (NRS) standardized data and progress reports across all of California's adult literacy providers.

Adult literacy providers may use this document as the policy foundation, in conjunction with Test Administration Manuals, *CASAS Administration Manual for California*, and regional training workshops to provide a basis for development of local procedures, guidelines, and implementation practices.

Acknowledgements

The CASAS Consortium Policy Council completed this document through the cooperative efforts of members of the CASAS team. The states that comprise the CASAS Consortium Policy Council are: (1) California; (2) Oregon; (3) Washington; (4) Kansas; (5) Minnesota; (6) Indiana; (7) Connecticut; and (8) Iowa. The State Director of Adult Education or the designee represents each respective state on the Policy Council.

The CDE recognizes the CASAS team for its efforts in creating a template by which states could develop their own assessment policy guidelines. Pat Rickard, CASAS Executive Director, Jim Harrison, Senior Research Associate, Linda Taylor, Director of Test Development, and Jane Egue, Director of Program Development, worked collaboratively to develop the assessment template based on the outline furnished by the ED:DAEL.

Section 1: Introduction and Context

A. Need for Assessment Policy

Standardized, ongoing assessment of learner progress is essential to ensure that all learners become proficient in literacy and language skills. Adult literacy providers should use Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) assessment data to place learners at appropriate levels of instruction, to diagnose learner strengths and weaknesses, to monitor progress, and to certify learner mastery at specific levels of instruction or readiness to exit adult education. To ensure assessment accuracy and consistency, the California Department of Education, Adult Education Office (CDE-AEO) prescribes that Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funded adult literacy providers use CASAS assessments with proven validity and reliability that correlate to the National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education. All CASAS assessment instruments undergo rigorous test development and validation procedures and meet the standards of the American Education Research Association (AERA), the National Council for Measurement in Education (NCME), and the American Psychological Association (APA). The *CASAS Technical Manual, Third Edition, 2004 (CTM)* contains detailed information about test validity and reliability (see Appendix A for more information regarding CASAS assessment validity and reliability).

B. Purpose and Use of Standardized Assessments

Subsequent sections of this document provide a more detailed discussion of the purposes, descriptions, policies, and test administration procedures of CASAS standardized assessments. In general, CASAS assessments are used to ensure accuracy in adult learner placement (appraisal tests), to diagnose learner strengths and weaknesses, to inform instruction (pretests), to monitor progress (post-tests), and to certify learner mastery (certification tests). Standardized administration of tests and assessment results provide the basis for state and federal accountability reporting.

Use of Informal Assessments

In addition to CASAS standardized assessments, the CDE encourages local adult literacy providers to use a variety of informal assessments to monitor learning and inform instruction on a regular, ongoing basis, including the use of teacher-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessments, and learner observations.

C. Summary and Overview of Standardized Assessments

This document defines the CDE assessment policy for the following WIA Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act funded programs: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), including General Educational Development

(GED), and English as a Second Language (ESL). This document identifies key assessment policies that support:

- Selection and use of appropriate assessment instruments
- Appropriate test administration, scoring, and reporting of test scores
- Appropriate use of test results to inform instruction and improve programs
- Reporting valid and reliable assessment results and related information for accountability to local, state, and federal funding sources and policymakers

The CDE-AEO assessment policy includes the selection and use of appropriate learner assessment and procedures for:

- Accurate learner placement into appropriate program and instructional level
- Diagnostic information to inform instruction
- Pretesting and post-testing to monitor progress toward goals
- Certification of level and program completion

This policy also includes staff training and test security requirements for all staff that administer and use the results of CASAS standardized assessments.

Appraisal Tests: Initial Orientation and Placement into Program and Instructional Level

Initial placement with an appraisal gauges a learner's reading, math, listening comprehension, writing, and speaking skills. The test results guide placement into the appropriate program or instructional level and identify the appropriate progress pretest level. The CDE strongly encourages the use of appraisals whenever feasible to ensure making appropriate decisions regarding:

1. Appropriate educational placement
2. Administration of appropriate pretest form
3. Selection of short- and long-term instructional goals

Placing learners in an instructional level that is not at their ability level may cause frustration or boredom, causing the student to leave the program. Learners who take an inappropriate level pretest may "top out" or score below the accurate range of the test level, and adult literacy providers will not have accurate baseline pretest information to inform instruction and monitor progress. Learners who have low skill

levels and identify secondary diploma or GED as a goal will not achieve their goal within a reasonable timeframe and may become discouraged. Use of appraisals and appropriate pretests assist the learner and the teacher in establishing an appropriate learner short-term goal. A short-term goal enables the learner to document success leading to the long-term goal. Learning gains and achievement of learner goals within a program year form the basis for the state's required annual report to the NRS.

Adult literacy providers may not use appraisals as a pretest or to measure learner progress. Each CASAS test administration manual includes specific recommendations about which level of pretest to administer, based on the appraisal test score. CASAS provides appraisals for reading, math, listening comprehension, writing, and speaking. Adult literacy providers should administer CASAS appraisal tests prior to learner placement and prior to administering the appropriate pretest as follows:

Table 1A CASAS Appraisal Tests for Adult Basic Education/Adult Secondary Education

<i>Skills Areas</i>	<i>Life Skills Form 30</i>	<i>Employability Form 120 or 130</i>	<i>Workforce Learning Form 220 or 230</i>
Reading	✓	✓	✓
Math	✓	✓	✓

Table 1B CASAS Appraisal Tests for English as a Second Language

<i>Skills Areas</i>	Reading	Listening	Writing	Speaking
<i>ESL Appraisal Form 20</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

Progress Testing: Pretest and Post-Test

CASAS designed standardized progress tests to assess learning along a continuum from beginning literacy and English language acquisition through completion of secondary level skills. Several test series monitor learning progress, with test difficulty levels ranging from below Level A through Level D. Each test level has alternate test forms parallel in content and difficulty. The test series differ primarily in contextual focus (for example, employability versus general life skills and work skills).


Selection of the appropriate test series is based on a learner's goals and the instructional focus of the program (general life and work skills, employability, and workplace). The pretest is administered to the learner as soon as feasible after enrollment into the program: either during the intake process after an appraisal is given, or after placing the learner into the appropriate instructional level. Adult literacy providers may find guidance for pretest and post-test selection in the Suggested Next Test Charts provided by CASAS or the TOPSpro™ Suggested Next Test Report by

Learner and Class. Learner post-tests are administered at the same level or a higher level, depending on the learners' pretest score. CASAS and TOPSpro™ recommend an alternate test form within the same test series for post-testing. Additionally, the post-test must be in the same skills area as the pretest, that is, programs cannot use a reading pretest and a math post-test to determine learner gains. Other sections of this document cover post-testing policies and procedures in more detail.

Appropriate Administration of CASAS Assessments

The appropriate use of CASAS assessments is as follows:

Table 2 CASAS Series Approved for Use by Workforce Investment Act Funded Literacy Providers

								
	Citizenship	Employability Competency System	Life and Work	Life Skills	POWER	Secondary Assessment	Workforce Learning Systems (WLS)	
Basic skills assessed in each series								
Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Standardized Multiple Choice
Math		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Listening		✓		✓			✓	
Programs that may use each series								
ESL	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
ABE		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
ASE		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Scoring and Alignment of CASAS with NRS Levels

Tables 3A and 3B show the relationship between CASAS levels, CASAS test levels, scale score ranges, and NRS levels for ABE, ASE, and ESL learners.

Table 3A CASAS Relationship to National Reporting System (NRS) Levels for Adult Basic Education

NRS Level		CASAS Level	Reading and Math Scale Score Ranges	Functional Writing Scale Score Ranges
1	Beginning ABE Literacy	A	200 and below	136* - 200
2	Beginning Basic Education	B	201-210	201 – 225
3	Low Intermediate Basic Education	B	211-220	226 - 242
4	High Intermediate Basic Education	C	221-235	243 - 260
5	Low ASE	D	236-245	261 - 270
6	High ASE	E	246 and above	271 and above

* Estimated score below the accurate range

Table 3B CASAS Relationship to National Reporting System (NRS) Levels for English as a Second Language

NRS Level		CASAS Level	Reading and Listening Scale Score Ranges	Functional Writing Scale Score Ranges
1	Beginning ESL Literacy	A	180 and below	136*
2	Beginning ESL	A	181-200	146 - 200
3	Low Intermediate ESL	B	201-210	201 – 225
4	High Intermediate ESL	B	211-220	226 - 242
5	Low Advanced ESL	C	221-235	243 - 260
6	High Advanced ESL	D	236-245	261 - 270

* Estimated score below the accurate range

D. Resources for Information and Assistance

For more information or assistance related to assessment policy or procedures in California, contact the CDE-AEO at (916) 322-2175.

For specific information about CASAS assessments, contact Linda Taylor, Director of Assessment Development, at CASAS by telephone at 1-800-255-1036, ext. 186, or e-mail at ltaylor@casas.org.

Section 2: General Assessment Requirements

A. Authorized Assessments

All learners must be assessed using authorized standardized assessments. All assessments listed in Table 2 meet NRS requirements rules for reporting.

Additionally, CASAS assessments:

- Are appropriate for measuring literacy and language development of adult learners.
- Have standardized administration and scoring procedures.
- Have alternate, equivalent forms for pretest and post-testing.
- Have evidence linking them to the NRS Educational Functioning Levels.

For more information on authorized assessments, refer to Section 3, Guidelines for Each Assessment.

B. Uniform Test Administration Times

The majority of CASAS assessments have appraisal tests for learners to take prior to taking a pretest. Appraisal test results indicate the appropriate level for instruction, as well as which pretest form adult literacy providers are to administer. To optimize assessment results, learners are to take a pretest as soon as possible upon entry into the program and before the occurrence of any substantial instructional intervention. Learners are to be pretested in the areas that are the focus of instruction, using the appropriate CASAS standardized test in reading, math, or listening comprehension. Learners are to be post-tested using an alternate form at the end of a semester, term, quarter, or other substantial block of instruction to document learning gains. Adult literacy providers are to ensure that testing times and conditions are uniform for both pretests and post-tests. The CASAS pretests and post-tests are designed so that most students are able to complete a test in one hour or less. CASAS recommends assessing after approximately 70-100 hours of instruction, with the following exceptions:

- Programs offering high intensity courses (for example, a class meets more than 15 hours per week) may choose to test at the end of a semester, term, quarter, or other substantial block of instruction, even though the instructional intervention is more than 100 hours of instruction.
- Programs offering low intensity courses with fewer than 70 hours in a semester, quarter, term, or other substantial block of instruction, may choose to administer a post-test at the end of the instructional period.

Programs may assess individual learners who indicate they are leaving the program before the scheduled post-test time to maximize collection of paired test data. However, testing should not occur before at least 40 hours of instruction.

Factors that affect learning gains include intensity and duration of instruction, motivation of learners, competence of instruction, the link between learner goals and instruction, and other instructional factors.

Post-test scores obtained at the end of a semester or other reporting period may serve as a pretest for the next semester or reporting period, if the interim does not exceed three to six months. Similarly, adult literacy providers may use the most recent assessment results for “stop-outs” returning to adult education classes, if the last test administered does not exceed the same three to six month time-period. This policy is designed to reduce or eliminate unnecessary testing of learners.

Program personnel may wish to retest “stop-outs” or learners returning the following semester or reporting period if there is reason to believe that during the learner’s absence or over the summer recess, a significant learning intervention occurred that may invalidate the learner’s previous assessment results. In such circumstances, retesting is always an option.

C. Testing for Citizenship Certification

To administer the *Citizenship Interview Test* for certification in the English Literacy and Civics Education, Citizenship Preparation program, adult literacy providers are to follow the guidelines in the *Self-Training Manual and Certification* for the CASAS *Citizenship Interview Test*. If retesting of a learner is necessary, a significant amount of intervening instructional hours must occur before the retesting.

D. Accommodations for Learners with Disabilities or Other Special Needs

Accommodations in testing alter the conditions for administering a test or change the nature of an assessment instrument, allowing test takers with disabilities to demonstrate their skills and abilities more accurately. Proper accommodations meet the needs of examinees without changing what the test measures.

Adult literacy providers are responsible for providing fully accessible services and for ensuring that these services meet reasonable criteria. Adult learners with disabilities are responsible for requesting accommodations and for submitting documentation of their disability at the time of registration, program entry, or after diagnosis. Adult literacy providers are to document the need to use a learner accommodation in official learner records, such as the Individual Program Education Plan (IPEP) or Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The documentation must show that the disability interferes with the learner’s ability to demonstrate performance on the test.

The information may be obtained from a doctor's report, a diagnostic assessment from a certified professional, or other clinical records. Adult literacy providers often can contact the local division of vocational rehabilitation or a secondary school to request documentation of a disability.

Accommodations in Test Administration Procedures

Local test administrators may provide or allow certain accommodations in test administration procedures or environment for documented disabilities without contacting CASAS. Examples include accommodations in test time, giving supervised breaks, or providing a sign language interpreter for test administration directions only. It is not an appropriate accommodation in test administration procedures to read a CASAS reading test to a learner with low literacy skills or blindness.

Use of Appropriate CASAS Test Forms

CASAS test forms that are appropriate for learners with a disability include computer-based tests and large-print tests, such as the Employability Competency System (ECS) and Life and Work reading pretest and post-tests, and tests with enhanced print such as the Life Skills Beginning Literacy Reading Assessment and Reading for Citizenship test forms. CASAS Functional Auditory and Braille tests to measure basic literacy skills for learners who are blind or have a visual impairment are in development.

Detailed information on providing accommodations can be found in *Guidelines for Providing Accommodations Using CASAS Assessment for Learners with Disabilities* available at <http://www.casas.org>.

Section 3: Guidelines for Each Assessment

A. Test Administration Manuals

The CDE-AEO requires that local adult literacy providers follow the test administration guidelines in each *Test Administration Manual (TAM)* published by CASAS for each test series used. All local adult literacy providers must maintain copies of *TAMs* onsite for all assessments used by the provider. *TAMs* provide quality control guidelines to ensure proper test use, administration, scoring, and interpretation of results. These manuals typically contain information about the following topics:

- The CASAS Assessment System
- Overview of CASAS Progress Testing
- Description of Tests

- Determining Pretest and Post-Test Level
- Test Security (See Section F below)
- Instructions for Administering Tests
- Scoring
- Data Collection
- Interpretation of Results
- Curriculum Planning, Instruction, and Assessment
- Resources
- Testing Accommodations
- Skill Level Descriptors
- Suggested Next Test Charts
- Answer Keys and Score Conversion Charts (for converting raw scores to scale scores)
- Learner Profile Sheets
- Learner Performance by Competency
- Class Profile by Competency

B. Information Included for Each Assessment

Table 2 in Section 1, CASAS Series Approved for Use by WIA Funded Programs, provides information about which assessments are appropriate for which learner populations. Tables 4A through 4G provide information about CASAS Test Forms by Skill Areas, Levels, and Series. The tables list multiple forms at each level; these are alternate forms for post-testing. In some instances, an “X” follows a test form number (e.g., 32X). These tests are extended range tests and may be used as an additional post-test within that specified level (for example, 32 and 32X are alternative forms for 31, all at level A). The tables also list the appropriate appraisal test(s) to accompany different CASAS test series.

Tables 4A-4G: CASAS Test Forms by Skill Areas, Levels, and Series

**Table 4A Reading for Adult Basic Education/Adult Secondary Education/
English as a Second Language**

Level	Life Skills Series	Life & Work Series	ECS Series	WLS Series	Citizenship Series
Beg. Literacy	27 28	27 28	27 28		27 28
A	31 32	81 82	11 12		951 952
AX	32 X	81 X 82 X			951 X 952 X
B	33 34	83 84	13 14 114	213 214	
BX	34 X				
C	35 36	85, 86* 185 186	15 16 116	215 216	Secondary Assessment Series
D	37 38	187 188	17 18	217 (id) 218 (id)	513 514

Appraisal	20 or 30	20, 30, 120 or 130	120 or 130	220 or 230
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*workplace focused
id = in development

Table 4B Math for Adult Basic Education/Adult Secondary Education

Level	Life Skills Series	ECS Series	WLS Series	Secondary Assessment
A	31 32	11 12		
B	33 34	13 14	213 214	
C	35 36	15 16	215 216	
D	37 38	17 18	217 (id) 218 (id)	505 506

Appraisal	30	120 or 130	220 or 230	
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id = in development

Table 4C Listening for English as a Second Language

Level	Life Skills Series	Life and Work Series	ECS and WLS Series
A	51 52	(id)	51 52
B	53 54	(id)	63 64
C	55 56	(id)	65 66

Appraisal	20	(id)	20
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id = in development

**Table 4D Writing for Adult Basic Education/Adult Secondary Education/
English as a Second Language**
(May be used for EL Civics, Civic Participation)

Level	Form #	Task	Notes
A - D	410 411	Form Form	Tests “filling out a form” (consumable)
A - D	460 461 462 463	Pictures: Grocery Store (revised) Accident (revised) Department Store (revised) Street Scene (revised)	Prompts are laminated and reusable Tests “writing a narrative”
A - D	464 465 466	Workplace Pictures: Restaurant Warehouse Hotel	Prompts are laminated and reusable Tests “writing a narrative”
A	430 431	Inventory Inventory	Package of test sheets includes test administration directions Tests “filling out a simple inventory form” (consumable)
A	440 441	Note Note	Package of test sheets includes test administration directions Tests “writing a short note” (consumable)
B - D	450	Letter	Write letter to a mayor

Table 4E Speaking for English as a Second Language
(May be used for EL Civics, Civic Participation)

Level	Form #	Series	Content
A - D	973 974	Citizenship (Citizenship Preparation)	Simulates United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS, formerly INS) oral citizenship interview
A - D	820 821	WLS (Civic Participation)	Assesses speaking ability in workplace contexts, including workplace safety and customer service

Table 4F Government and History for English Literacy and Civics Education, Citizenship Preparation, English as a Second Language

Level	Form #	Series	Content
B - C	963 964	Citizenship	Multiple-choice questions Tests knowledge of U.S. government and history

Table 4G Special Needs (for learners with developmental disabilities)

Level	POWER	Adult Life Skills (R)
Beginning Literacy	305 Workplace and Employability Skills	27 28
AA		310 311
AAA	303 Community Access	320 321
AAAA	301 (id) Independent Living	332 331
AAAAA	Not Available	342 343

id = in development

C. Training Requirements for Administering Standardized Assessments

Training of adult literacy provider personnel is essential to a quality CASAS implementation. Only adult literacy provider personnel that have completed training by CASAS certified personnel may use CASAS assessments. CASAS requires that at a minimum, one person from each agency using the CASAS system successfully complete CASAS Implementation Training. Once trained, this individual can train others within his or her respective agency but may not train outside that agency. For local training purposes, instructors may examine CASAS tests for review purposes only. It is essential that this occur in a controlled, supervised environment with test security safeguards in place. Adult literacy providers are to take special care to ensure the collection of all test booklets at the completion of training.

CASAS has developed separate implementation training sessions for ABE/ASE, ESL, and Employability Skills. These training sessions teach participants to administer, score, and interpret CASAS reading, listening, and math assessments.

Implementation training also addresses how to use the CASAS competency system and CASAS resources, such as Quick Search, to facilitate instruction. Separate

training sessions are available for CASAS Functional Writing, Providing Options for the Workplace Education and Rehabilitation (POWER), for developmentally disabled adults, Citizenship, and Workplace Speaking, among others.

The CDE-AEO requires all adult literacy providers to comply with the CASAS training policy. The CDE-AEO also requires each agency to participate in California Accountability training annually, which provides guidance on specific state data and accountability requirements and timelines.

D. Raw Score Conversion and Using Scale Scores to Place Learners into NRS Levels

Each CASAS *Test Administration Manual* provides charts and guidelines for converting raw scores to scale scores. The CDE-AEO requires adult literacy providers to use these as reference points. CASAS subdivided scale score ranges to correspond to the NRS levels.

NRS guidelines require appropriate placement of learners in instructional areas. Adult literacy providers use the skill area (for example, reading, and math) with the lower pretest score to place learners, if the learner is to receive instruction in the skill related to the lower instructional level. Placement at the lower instructional level is the basis of determining which pretest to administer.

E. Test Security Agreements

The CDE-AEO requires that all WIA Title II funded adult literacy providers sign an annual test security agreement. This agreement includes the following stipulations:

- The local adult education program director assumes responsibility for safeguarding all CASAS-developed assessment materials, including test administration manuals, and answer sheets (which contain marks or responses).
- All CASAS materials are stored in a locked, preferably fireproof, file cabinet accessible to the program director or the director's designee(s).
- Staff members who administer assessments return all materials immediately after use to the program director or the director's designees.
- All answer sheets and writing samples are treated as confidential until destroyed.
- Duplication of any test form or any portion of any test form for any reason is prohibited.

- The adult literacy provider will supply inventory information concerning CASAS materials, upon request.
- Defaced materials are not to be destroyed, unless authorized by the CDE-AEO.
- Adult literacy providers may not use displays, questions, or answers that appear on any CASAS test to create materials designed to teach or prepare learners to answer CASAS test items. Instead, programs are to use instructional resources provided by CASAS Quick Search and other support materials to link curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

F. Quality Control Procedures

Entry of Assessment Data: The CDE-AEO requires adult literacy providers to enter assessment data into the TOPSpro™ database on a regular basis.

Quality Control Procedures: The CDE-AEO uses the TOPSpro system to ensure that quality control checks are in place for all assessment data collection and reporting.

- Local TOPSpro Data Integrity Reports assist adult literacy providers to conduct data integrity checks to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data submitted. TOPSpro system logic prevents inappropriate assessments from being scored and reported (i.e. administering the same form for pretesting and post-testing).
- Statewide quarterly reporting of data assists CDE-AEO in monitoring the data collecting and reporting process and in identifying data collection and assessment issues that may need to be addressed through targeted training and technical assistance. Annual monitoring of funded agencies also includes onsite verification that local providers have policies and procedures in place to ensure accurate and complete data collection and to ensure the appropriate administration, scoring and reporting of assessment results.

Purchasing Procedures for Each Assessment: The CDE-AEO requires programs to order CASAS assessments authorized for use in California directly from CASAS. The CDE-AEO provides CASAS with a list of approved assessments to ensure that local adult education programs order appropriate materials.

Appendix A

Validity and Reliability

Validity

The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999) state that validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences made from test scores. There are various evidences of validity with construct validity encompassing the overriding issue of proper use and construction of test items, and with content-related and criterion-related validity as subcomponents. Item content evidence is a measure of the extent to which test items measure what they are intended to measure. For a detailed discussion of CASAS content validity evidence, see the *CASAS Technical Manual*.

Criterion-related validity, which is sometimes referred to as predictive validity, assesses the ability or effectiveness of an instrument in predicting something it should theoretically be able to predict. CASAS created ABE Skill Level Descriptors (reading, math, and writing skills) to show a continuum of skills from beginning ABE through advanced adult secondary levels; CASAS also created ESL Skill Level Descriptors (listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills) for ESL from beginning literacy/pre-beginning ESL through proficient skills. Skill Level Descriptors provide general content information on how an adult learner's numerical scale score on a CASAS test in a specific skill area corresponds to the job-related and life skills tasks that a person can generally accomplish.

A common numerical scale reports results from most CASAS tests. CASAS has successfully used this scale with more than three million adult and youth learners. Five broad levels divide the CASAS scale: A (beginning literacy) to E (advanced secondary), each encompassing a range of scores. CASAS further subdivides levels A and B to guide instructional placement and to monitor learner progress. CASAS defines each level scale score range with corresponding competency descriptors of performance in employment and adult life skills contexts.

Expert teachers, members of the CASAS National Consortium, as well as external validation studies have validated the CASAS Skill Level Descriptors. See the *CASAS Technical Manual*, pages 57–70. During the late 1990s, staff from the Center for Applied Linguistics and CASAS worked together to review and update the correlation between Student Performance Levels (SPLs) and CASAS levels to ensure that the NRS Skill Level Descriptors used for reporting learner gains were consistent with research already done in the field. Large-scale CASAS implementing states such as California, Connecticut, and Oregon participated in a national-level NRS advisory committee and provided guidance in the initial development and implementation of the NRS.

Once the NRS finalized the educational functioning levels, CASAS conducted a review and confirmed that the CASAS Skill Level Descriptors align with the skill levels of the

NRS. Table 5 presents the relationship among CASAS levels and score ranges and NRS Performance Levels. This table also shows how CASAS, the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), SPLs, and years of schooling completed.

Table 5- Relationship Among CASAS, National Reporting System, National Adult Literacy Survey, Student Performance Levels, and Years of Schooling Completed

CASAS Levels	CASAS Score Ranges	NRS Levels and Names for ABE	NRS Levels and Names for ESL	NALS Levels	SPL Levels	Years of School Completed
A	180 and below		1 Beginning ESL Literacy	1	1	1 to 2
A	181 – 200	1 Beginning ABE Literacy	2 Beginning ESL	1	2 and 3	1 to 2
B	201 – 210	2 Beginning Basic Education	3 Low Intermediate ESL	1	4	3 to 5
B	211 – 220	3 Low Intermediate Basic Education	4 High Intermediate ESL	1	5	6 to 7
C	221 – 235	4 High Intermediate Basic Education	5 Low Advanced ESL	2	6	8 to 10
D	236 – 245	5 Low Adult Secondary Education	6 High Advanced ESL	2/3	7	11 to 12
E	246 and above	6 High Adult Secondary Education		3	8	13+

Reliability

The *CASAS Technical Manual* provides data on the reliability of the item bank (Chapter 3) and specific test series (Chapters 4 and 5). The test administration manuals for each test series also contain information about reliability.

Reliability (test accuracy) has two major subcomponents — consistency and stability. For each scale score attained on a CASAS test, a standard error of measurement (SEM) is given. In addition to reporting a scale score for raw scores attained on a test, CASAS established a range of accuracy for each test form. For every score in the accurate range, a SEM for each scale score is given. For scale scores exceeding the accurate range, CASAS provides a usable, conservative scale score estimate. However, test administrators are encouraged to administer a test at the next more

difficult test level to obtain a more accurate scale score estimate. CASAS does not report scale scores for raw scores falling below the accurate range. Each of the test forms in Chapters 4 and 5 of the *CASAS Technical Manual, Third Edition*, in addition to the SEMs, displays the Test Information Function.

CASAS uses the most currently researched and recommended methodology in educational measurement practice — Item Response Theory (IRT) — to establish indexes of item bank, test, and test score reliability. For indexes of consistency, CASAS tests for the unidimensionality of the item bank ensuring items all measure the same underlying construct. See pages 29 through 50 of the *CASAS Technical Manual* for results of these analyses. The *CASAS Technical Manual* presents traditional item statistics, including item point biserial correlations and their p-values, for all the test series.

The test for item stability is found under “parameter invariance” (pages 51–52) and “differential item functioning” (pages 52–56). Parameter invariance analyses test whether the item difficulties have changed over time. The 2002 findings show that the item difficulties have maintained their relative difficulties since their original calibrations in the 1980s. Differential item functioning (DIF) tests whether the item difficulties change in the measurement of different kinds of learners, such as learners of different gender and different ethnicity. The findings show that the item difficulties have remained stable, regardless of gender or ethnicity.

Studies Conducted

The Program Effectiveness Panel of the U.S. Department of Education (1993) evaluated and upheld three claims of CASAS implementation of effective educational programs. Each claim centered on adult learners in adult and alternative education programs. The adoption of key elements of the CASAS system determined the degree of program implementation. These key elements include identifying CASAS Competencies necessary for learners to meet their goals, linking these competencies to instructional materials using the CASAS Instructional Materials Quick Search, and linking these competencies to appropriate CASAS assessment tools. Learners within education programs that adopted the key elements demonstrated:

1. Significant learning gains
2. Increased hours of participation
3. Achievement of higher goal attainment compared to programs that have not adopted the key elements

Numerous studies such as the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (1991) have repeatedly confirmed this claim. In addition, two California studies, an Oregon study as well as a North Carolina study, among others, confirm these three claims (for a detailed literature review, refer to the *CASAS Technical Manual, Third Edition*).

Another important study examined the relationship of CASAS to the 2002 version of the GED. This study used data from California, Iowa, Oregon, Kansas, and Hawaii (total number of participants= 4801). The study found a clear monotonic increasing relationship between CASAS reading scores and GED reading scores and CASAS math scores and GED math scores. Moreover, the study found a similar relationship between CASAS reading and overall GED results averaged across the five test content areas. (See the *CASAS Technical Manual*, pages 63–65.)

There have been a number of recent studies conducted across the United States to reaffirm that the content and competencies addressed in the initial development of the item banks are still valid and relevant to the current needs of learners, instructors, administrators, employers, and social service agencies:

- The Iowa Basic Skills Survey (IABSS), 1995
- Validation of Foundation Skills (Indiana Department of Education), 1996
- Targeting Education: The Connecticut Basic Skills Survey, 1997
- CABSS Report: California Adult Basic Skills Survey, 1999

For more detailed information about these validation studies refer to the *CASAS Technical Manual*, pages 24–26 and Appendix C, pages 213–225.

CASAS has recently undertaken the development of a content standards framework on behalf of CASAS National Consortium states. The project uses the expertise of adult education professionals across the country to determine the essential content standards in reading and math for ABE and ASE and in reading and listening for ESL. The project identifies the basic skills content standards at each NRS level embedded in CASAS Competencies and links them to appropriate CASAS assessments.